



The Hoffman Tribune
HOFFMAN, MN

Outd

Coffman earns Eagle Scout rank with removal project at Kensington Runest

by Gina Ronhovde

Spencer Coffman and members of his Boy Scout Troop 420 were on hand Saturday, November 17 to aid Coffman with his buckthorn removal Eagle Merit project at Kensington Runestone Park.

In order to become an Eagle Scout he must earn the required merit badges (over 20) and Coffman has earned about 100. He must also serve in a leadership position and is

currently the Senior Patrol Leader in his troop. Other requirements include having a scoutmaster's conference, planning and carrying out an approved project, and having a board review his scouting history.

Coffman's approved project is a continuation of a previous scout's project to help the DNR and Douglas County Parks Department remove the buckthorn throughout the park. Although much was

removed, most of it grew back thicker.

Buckthorn resembles a tree but it is actually classified as a highly invasive weed that "chokes out" nearby plants and trees essential for abundant wildlife. European or common buckthorn and glossy or alder buckthorn are listed as restricted noxious weeds in Minnesota. It degrades and threatens the future of forests, wetlands, prairies, and other natural habitats and contributes to erosion by shading out other plants that grow on the forest floor. The plant also plays host to pests such as crown rust fungus and soybean aphid.

According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, an average forest has 17 generations of original plant growth. However, a buckthorn-infested forest has only three generations, less than one-sixth of the original. Common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) was first brought to Minnesota from Europe in the mid-1800s as a very popular hedging material.

Shortly after its introduction here, it was found to be quite invasive in natural areas. The nursery industry stopped selling it in the 1930s, but many buckthorn hedges may still be found in older neighborhoods throughout Minnesota. It is illegal to import, sell, or transport buckthorn in Minnesota.

Douglas County Superintendent of Parks Al Liefert first assisted Coffman with the information how to identify and and kill the buckthorn. Buckthorn leafs out early and retains leaves late into the fall creating dense shade that helps it to out-



photo by Gina Ronhovde

Spencer Coffman eliminating some buckthorn.

buckthorn one Park

compete many native plants. Because it's a weed, its green leaves late in the year makes it easier to identify once most leaves have fallen.

Coffman and his group removed the buckthorn in two effective ways: cutting it down at the base of the trunk, and applying a photosynthesis inhibitor called glyphosate to the top of the freshly-cut stump.

The glyphosate was dyed purple so the group would be able to identify which leaves had already been treated. The chemical stops the photosynthesis process by deactivating the plant's enzymes, which essentially causes the buckthorn plant to die. The cut buckthorn branches were hauled to an open area and collected by county workers to shred them into chips and distribute them in a regulated area.

Coffman has now earned all of his badges required for the Eagle Scout rank. In order to complete the rank a board must review his scouting history and ask Coffman a lengthy list of questions regarding his interests, views, hobbies, and goals.

Coffman said one of the more rewarding experiences involved in becoming an Eagle Scout has been seeing how generous people are with their time and effort, in addition to the reward of accomplishment itself. "Earning the badges is a great learning experience. With badges for every college course you can narrow down what you want to do for a living," Coffman said.



contributed photo

Spencer was assisted by Scout Troop #420 during his project. Pictured left to right: (standing) Kyle Coffman, John Coffman, Chris Just, Travis Brede, Spencer Coffman, (kneeling) Dawn and Bruce Batzlaff.